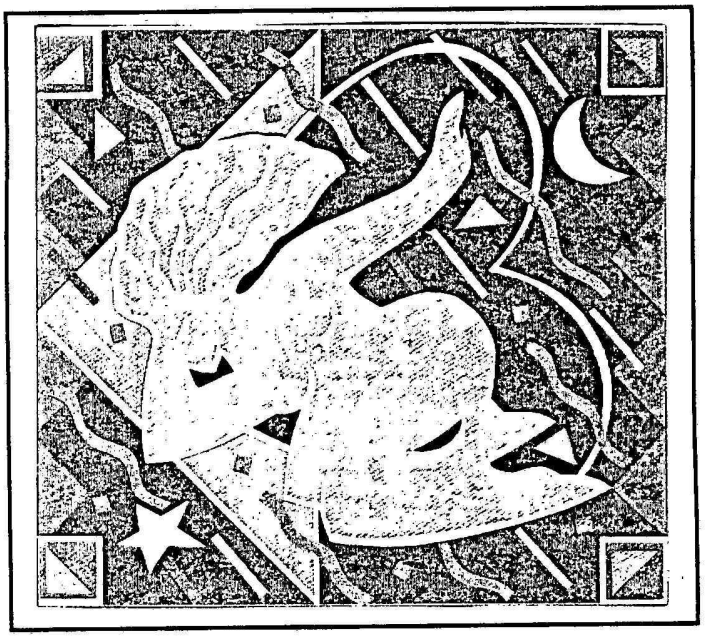
The Newsletter of the Seattle Bisexual Women's Network, a member project of Gay Community Social Services

NORTH Bi NORTHWEST

JUNE 1992 VOLUME 5, NUMBER 3

THE NORTH BI NORTHWEST INTERVIEW: ELIZABETH-REBA WEISE



Elizabeth Reba Weise was one of the founding member of the Seattle Bisexual Women's Network in 1986. Together with Lenore Norrgard she started North Bi Northwest and was its editor for the first five years. She's written extensively on bisexual issues, and has been published in *Bisexuality: A Sourcebook and Reader* and *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, as well as *off our backs*, *Lesbian Contradiction*, and the *Seattle Gay News*. Together with Amanda Udis-Kessler and Sarah Murray she wrote a rebuttal to the articles "What Do Bisexual's Want?" in the last issue of *Out/Look* magazine. We'll see if they publish it. She is currently working as a reporter for the Associated Press in Seattle.

I met with Elizabeth Reba Weise at her apartment in Fremont. She shares her home with her lover, and no cats. *Closer to Home: Bisexuality & Feminism* has just been printed by Seal Press, and a box of the first copies is sitting on her living room floor. This is the first time I get to see the finished product, and it's wonderful. Beth makes some tea, and we settle into chairs in her study.

LJC: What is your connection with Seal Press, and why did they come to you for this book?

ERW: Well, actually, this is one of the glory points of my life. They had actually read some of the articles I'd written in the gay press, and I was in San Francisco and they tracked me down, and asked if I wanted to edit a book. I'd actually met two of the people from the Press, so there was a tenuous connection.

LJC: So their idea was for an anthology, not your original thoughts?

ERW: Well, they didn't know. They wanted to do a book on bisexuality, and Lenore and I met with them several times, and we pushed for our book, but because at that point even *Bi Any Other Name* wasn't out, so they felt an anthology would better kind of introduce some of the ideas.

LJC: But didn't you know *Bi Any Other Name* was coming out?

ERW: Yes, I'd written for it, and I told Barbara (Wilson, publisher/editor of Seal) that, but she was right. In the beginning, it's better to have a lot of people's ideas, a lot of different thoughts. Later we can have whole books written by one person.

LJC: Were just you and Lenore approached?

ERW: Yes.

LJC: What are some of the other 13 chapters you mention in the introduction?

ERW: Originally, Lenore and I wanted to write the whole book ourselves. It would have been more coherent, would have hung together better. There were some things we couldn't find anyone to write about, like "Women who have been in lesbian relationships, and end up deciding to have relationships with men because lesbian relationships are too cloying." Topics like "Can Bisexuals be Monogamous?" and "Feminism, the Rocky Horror Picture Show and me, coming out in 1985" have been written about in other areas.

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SBWN Statement of Purpose

We are a group of feminists working to create a bisexual support network and to promote equality for bisexual people in both the heterosexual and lesbian/gay communities. We regard ourselves as part of the larger sexual minority community, and consider the fight for lesbian/gay rights to be our own. We are dedicated to the right of all people to define their own sexuality, free from any social, political or economic coercion. We seek to provide a safe place for women to explore all aspects of their sexuality. All women are welcome to attend SBWN activities. While we work with men on issues of common interest, our group is exclusively female to keep the concerns of women in the forefront of our work.

The discrimination we face as women and as sexual minorities is only one facet of oppression: all bigotry is our enemy. We stand behind the racial and ethnic liberation movements and the struggle for economic equality. However, in any work we do, feminism and the interests of women will be our central concern.

Seattle Bisexual Women's Network, P.O. Box 30645; Greenwood Station Seattle, WA 98103-0645, (206) 783-7987.

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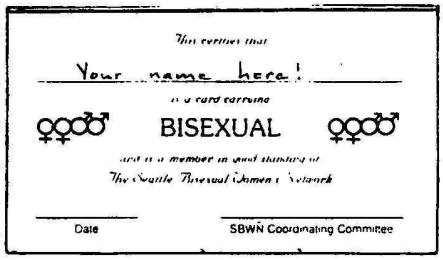

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MEETING NOTES

SAFE SPACE FOR ALL

by Alice Chalmers

PART ONE facilitated by Lisa H.

About twenty women gathered to tell what they find not safe to say here. We introduced ourselves to the group with our name and a place that does feel safe for us (e.g. nestled in bed, with friends, places in nature).

The first exercise explored advantages of being 'exclusive' (homogeneous). We came up with: community, familiarity, less explaining to do, one's views being accepted, affirmation, avoidance of those who don't like what you are, common 'language', deeper exploration of affinity and self, avoidance of conflict.

Homogeneity tends to be self-perpetuating, and can be maintained by how we label ourselves, unclear goals & purposes, phone screening, no inclusive (welcoming) behavior, language, unchallenged statements, assumptions being made (i.e. of similarities), cliques, using a minority 'spokesperson,' and uncomfortable, or threatening-to-others topics

Next, we looked at advantages of being diverse and found: views from other perspectives, broadened sense of safety and familiarity, compassion, challenge, lessons in social diplomacy, test of adaptability, education, insight and anonymity. There are also opportunities to discover commonalities, change how one sees oneself, network and form alliances. We agreed that the growth of a group can advance personal growth of its members.

Responsible facilitating, probably the most effective and important tool, headed our list of methods of creating safe, inclusive space. We can initially help people be more comfortable by introducing everyone and welcoming newcomers, asking if anyone has special needs (transportation, child care, bathroom access, etc.), and stating rules of confidentiality. The group should have a clear statement of purpose, and be clear about who is included/excluded.

At meetings we should value everyone's statements, appreciate alternative opinions, listen respectfully, and encourage quiet people to talk. Meeting structure can influence outcome: breaking into smaller groups, sitting in a circle, doing physical exercises like line sorts, and providing opportunity for anonymous input. We can each admit our own biases, and acknowledge our own prejudice. However, it is important and reassuring to sometimes emphasize our diversity and show that we reflect a continuum of experience and feelings. Topics should reflect diversity of interests and selves, or explore subjects unfamiliar or scary. Finally, hanging out after meetings, or other socializing can help build community. Next, we were given five quiet minutes to write on index cards something we're uncomfortable talking about in this group. The cards were folded and put into a jar, which was then handed around again. As each woman received the jar she pulled one card and read it aloud. All maintained respectful silence, but for a few quiet exclamations of recognition, during the two cycles of reading.

The cards said, 'I feel uncomfortable telling you I...':

-am not feminist enough.

-find group's expressions are too gender neutral, not pro female enough.

--find men much more attractive than women.

-feel like a lesbian.

-feel asexual; heavy sexual overtones make me uncomfortable.

-want pure sexuality, to express my lust.

-am sexually inexperienced, have unsafe sex, find sex not as good as it used to be, faked orgasms, have had affairs.

-have monogamous partner, people may not be interested in just being friends here.

-was so poor I exchanged sex favors for money to get by.

-thank you (for asking).

-am close to family, had an abortion, hate myself for being fat, *do* have prejudice, am not open, feel rejected a lot, am Jewish, feel uncomfortable being vulnerable or expressing strong emotions, am afraid to criticize others, own a TV & vcr, feel growing feelings of disconnection to this group, am uncomfortable with 'the transsexual thing'.

-feel no one would really care all that much if I died.

-I am too uncomfortable to write it, but it may not be the group, but my own discomfort.

In review of the meeting, several women said they'd been reminded that there's a bigger world out there, and others' needs should be remembered and respected. Many were impressed with our sharing of self, feeling of regained intimacy and connectedness and power. A newcomer was reassured that personal safety is a concern to the group. Someone else said she doesn't actually feel

(Continued on page 6)

From the Editors

Hello folks!

We're still waiting for your feedback on our/your newsletter! What's keeping you from sending us letters of praise and/or criticism?

Remember that our next deadline is July 5, so get those articles and reviews in.

Be sure to come out in force for Pride Day on June 28-with those beautiful bi T-shirts and buttons.

The transexual policy was retained as is after much discussion and an inability to reach consensus on proposed changes. Feelings were strong on both sides, but most members are comfortable with the policy as it stands.

MANY THANKS to Jim (especially!), Ann, Ted, ben, and all cats everywhere for all their help and support.

-See you next time,
Erica and Dawn

NEWS

Excuse Me, May I Pick Your Brain?

What do you want to talk about at topic meetings? Is there something you've been wanting to discuss, learn about, or share with others? All suggestions will be considered and everyone who comes to meetings is part of the decision process. Suggest **your** topic at SBWN meetings, by writing to us, or by leaving a message on the BiPhone for Kathleen. If you can present a topic, facilitate a meeting, or suggest source material on a particular topic, don't forget to mention that, too. Thank you!

Oberlin College's Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Alumni (OLGBA) met during the weekend of October 11-13, 1991 for its first reunion as an officially recognized body. Oberlin College, which formally recognized lesbians, gays, and bisexuals among its alumni in September 1989, was the first college in the United States to do so. The OLGBA has more than 800 registered members-twice the number it had just two years ago.

In its statement of purpose, the OLGBA proclaimed that it exists to "facilitate the relationship between the college and its lesbian, gay, and bisexual alumni, and to increase the visibility of LGB persons and concerns in the life of the college."

For additional information contact:
J. Winters
2104 Pauline Blvd, #307
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Photographer Laurie E. Usher will be exhibiting her women's tennis photographs during the month of June at the Wildrose Tavern in Seattle on 1021 E Pike. There will be a slideshow June 11 at 8pm, highlighting Martina, Billie, Steffi and others-donations are welcome.

The Triangle Club of Seattle Central Community College invites you to "The Dance of Freedom" on Friday, June 12 from 8pm to 1am. This is an all ages event at the Seattle Masonic Temple on Capitol Hill. For further information call 587-6924.

The first International Display of the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt will take place in Washington, D.C. on October 9-11, 1992. In just five years, the quilt has grown from 1,920 panels to over 15,000 memorial panels. For more information on travel and lodging arrangements call (415)863-5511.

Sex Conversion in Kakrol

Kakrol *(Momordica dioica)*, of Indo-Malayan origin, is in the cucumber family and it is cultivated in India, Bangladesh, and nearby countries as a summer vegetable. The plant is monoecious, that is, male and female flowers are on separate plants. In Japan researchers treating female flowers with dilute concentrations of silver nitrate found that they became bisexual, and the plants produced bisexual flowers for a short time. Pollen from bisexual flowers was not effective in fertilizing other bisexual flowers, but was as effective as that of male flowers in fertilizing female flowers. *Scientia horticulturae* 47:335-48.

(I wonder if this would help if you find yourself crushed out on an unattainable heterosexual woman. Maybe fix her a silver nitrate bubble bath?)

The Dignity Seattle Pride Weekend Breakfast, a benefit for the Multifaith AIDS Project, will be held Saturday, June 27 from 8am to Noon at St. Joseph's Catholic Church at 19th Ave. E and Aloha. Tickets are $5.

HOT DAM! women, sex and latex...,

Are you finding it difficult to obtain more information about woman-to-woman HIV and STD transmission? Do you have supoort for practicing safer sex? Are you often at a loss or uncomfortable with the language of sex? If you answered yes to any of these questions, the Northwest AIDS Foundation has a new pilot program for you!

This three hour workshop was created to encourage and support Lesbians and Bisexual women to talk about sex, sexuality and sexual safety, openly and honestly, to develop skills in communication and negotiating about sexual safety, and to explore the infinite possibilities in creatively eroticizing safer sex.

For more information and registration, please call 329-6923 ext. 241.

In addition, the Northwest AIDS Foundation is co-sponsoring, with the 1992 Freedom Day Committee, a **Women's Underwear and Leather Fashion Show** fundraiser. This event will take place on Thursday, June 18 at TUGS, 518 E. Pine. All proceeds will go to the Freedom Day Committee. An evening of sultry women, hot fashion, and erotic dancing is guaranteed!

Loraine Hutchins, co-editor of *Bi Any Other Name*, appears in the current issue of *On Our Backs*. The text accompanying the photo spread mentions her connection with the bisexual community. Go, Loraine!

OPINION

PARADE NAME CHANGE: REALITY OR RHETORIC

by Kathleen E. Bennett

The official new name for Seattle's June 28 pride march is "The 1992 Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Pride Parade/March and Freedom Rally." The name change was accomplished by the hard work and perseverance of members of the bisexual community and transgendered people in alliance with each other. That Seattle is the first major city to recognize the inclusion of bisexuals and transpeople in the name of its parade is somehow not surprising, since both communities are significantly strong and numerous here.

I honor the Freedom Day Committee for accepting and rallying to the name change, even in the face of controversy. Like the FDC, many events, organizations, and publications in the gay and lesbian community/ies have been adding the word "bisexual" to their names. Increasing awareness of the diversity of our extended Queer family has picked up pace steadily and reached a point where it cannot be turned back. Lesbians and gays are becoming aware that we have always been with them, and *for* them.

In addition to institutionalizing this recognition, changing the name of our community's largest and most visible event will also have the effect of alerting the straight world that there is more to Queerness than they may believe. Our adversaries gain when they are able to rely on simplified, stereotyped ideas of who we are, what we look like, what we do, where we come from, who we care about, and what is the reality of our lives. In contrast, our being out and proud and *truthful* about all those things is an important part of our struggle against the ignorance that feeds Queer-hating bigotry. Visibility is more than just a requirement for survival — it *is* survival.

While I am pleased and proud at the increased inclusiveness demonstrated by changing the name of the annual "family reunion," I am keeping a wary eye open, trained by past scorchings on the part of well-meaning and not-so-well-meaning lesbians and gays. A simple name change will not end the misunderstanding and mistrust that some members of the gay and lesbian community/ies have directed towards their black-sheep bisexual cousins hidden in the attic.

Often, the rhetoric that a political movement adopts to further its goals may be mainstreamed once that movement cannot be ignored any longer. This mainstreaming often waters down the real-world analysis that underlay the terms of argument in the first place. I sincerely hope that the call for "diversity" that has been one of the major rallying cries of the bisexual movement will not suffer this fate. As our lesbian and gay family becomes more willing to say our name out loud, I hope that they see us not simply as tokens of "diversity" to make them look good in the prevailing winds of change, but are willing to be fully proud of us. Proud of us for who we are, the way we live our lives and see the world, both in our profound similarities to themselves and also in the ways that we are truly different from them. Lip service is not enough.▼

MORE NEWS...

United Way Reaches Out...

In April, Donna Eagle of United Way King County, in cooperation with Seattle Counseling Services for Sexual Minorities (SCS), called a meeting of 'key informants in the community' of sexual minority agencies. Fourteen people, representing about twenty agencies, gathered at SCS's facility (with impressive views across Elliott Bay). In Seattle there are two United Way member agencies serving sexual minority populations: Stonewall Recovery Services and Seattle Counseling Services. In only two other cities in the U.S. does United Way fund any sexual minority special interest groups.

Ms. Eagle, who acknowledged that she comes from a different culture and wants to hear our viewpoints, will be our advocate to her conservative mainstream employer (admittedly not on the leading edge of diversity of employees). She listened carefully and sensitively, and asked questions for clarification. Her purpose was to hear from us what we want/need to help us serve our communities with issues other than AIDS (which has its own category and sometimes overshadows other important needs). United Way of King County now funds on a biennial cycle, so decisions made now last a long time.

Our purpose was to present unmet needs and issues important to the sexual minority community, which is United Way's most unrecognized and underfunded special interest group, and to find out how we can impact funding. We are now working on our proposal, and will report later on the progress we've made.▼

-Contributed by Peggy Walsh

NEWS

PRIDE EVENTS' NAME CHANGE WITHSTANDS OPPOSITION

by ben e factory

On March 1st, the community group that organizes Seattle's annual Pride events, the Freedom Day Committee (FDC), voted 30 to 1 in favor of including Bisexual and Transgender people in the name, materials, and workings of Pride events. Adding two words to the old name, the new name is "The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Parade/March and Freedom Rally"; just a month later, this new name came into contention. The battle started on the *Seattle Gay News* letters-to-the-editor page. Two Gay men who opposed Bi and Trans inclusion said it was "confusing" and "watering down" the "Gay" (note: not the "Gay/Lesbian") community with people they saw as riding on their coat- tails. A pain and anger-filled letter in response from two Trans activists then set off an escalation of miscommunication as well as the opposition's threats to boycott and thereby sabotage Pride fundraisers and events.

Community forums were organized by the Freedom Day Committee and held on April 21st and 28th at Hamburger Mary's in the Broadway Market. These forums defused the conflict by airing and clarifying the issues of inclusion and diversity, neutralized the opposition to Bi and Trans inclusion by discrediting the bigotry and absurdity of their positions, and mobilized more people to work on Pride as an inclusive effort.

Our allies at these forums included some important members of the community: March On Washington Regional Co- Chairs Gwen Hall and George Bakan, Trans activist Princess LaRouge, and Queer Nation's Bill Ross - all of whom along with Ben Factory made up the pro-inclusion side of the panel; and Gay, pro-inclusion State Representative Cal Anderson moderated.

Speaking against the name change were: Howard Martin, the opposition's primary speaker who works at R Place; *SGN* writer Alan Neff; and Ed Sampson, a Hamburger Mary's worker whose anti-Lesbian and anti-inclusion jabs drew boos and hisses, after which he walked out of the 4/21 forum.

A petition was circulated by Howard Martin and his associates. Circulating primarily in the bars, the petitioners collected about 1000 signatures, almost all from Gay men, for the reversal of the inclusion decision which they claimed promoted divisive "sub-identifications." They wanted to call the events "Pride," plain and simple... or rather timid and closeted.

People signed up and spoke after the panelists, overwhelmingly in favor of inclusion. Finally even the opposition panelists agreed to support inclusion though they desired a shorter name. Many people supported a name for next year that retained inclusion while putting some part of the name into a subtitle ("Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender Pride - Parade/March and Freedom Rally - Seattle 1993").

The main outcomes of these forums were: 1) a deepened commitment to inclusion on the part of many members of FDC and the larger Queer community; 2) the first large-scale well-publicized educational effort in Seattle's Queer community on Bi and Trans inclusion; 3) us finding out who our allies are; and 4) FDC receiving its largest contributions ever ($500-$1000) for Pride organizing from the very bars that were challenging the name change!

To prevent any opposition effort to reverse Bi and Trans inclusion next year (as happened in Northampton MA), I would encourage you to come to the first FDC meeting next year to establish your voting rights in the group, help reaffirm the place of Bi and Trans people in the Queer community, and get involved from the beginning in each year's largest Queer visibility event happening worldwide.▼

SAFE SPACE ...

(Continued from page 3)

PART TWO, two months later, facilitated by Ellen B.

Fourteen women came together to continue our quest for safe space. We again were asked to write anonymously what we're uncomfortable saying. What we wrote on the cards shows that while we feel so isolated on our issues, so many sound familiar to others here. Many of us heard cards that we could have written ourselves.

From concerns expressed here we came up with suggestions for future topic discussions: having family/friends who are HIV+ or have AIDS; dating women/men, our feelings about men/women; racism, internalized racism, interracial dating; sexual and sexuality issues and prejudices.

Another prevalent issue had to do with intimacy. We have trouble asking for help, and knowing how to reach out. We'd like to be able to give support in a way that is meaningful, rather than seeming superficial, but we often feel self-conscious expressing emotion as well as when receiving personal attention. Sometimes there isn't really a basis of closeness or trust that would help a person feel understood. We agreed there should be no mandatory touching (e.g. group hugs), as not everyone is comfortable getting physical with strangers. Some women get their intimacy and friendship needs met elsewhere and use the group for other purposes.

We plan to do networking on carpooling, childcare, jobs, housing and any other special needs we are aware of, as we continue our personal and community growth.▼

FEATURE

WHY TURN AWAY AN ALLY? WHY TURN AWAY YOUR SISTERS?

An earlier version of this article was printed in BiWomen, the Newsletter of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network.

The first version of this article was a posting on "Sappho", an electronic bulletin board for lesbian and bisexual women, during a recent round of what we of Sappho refer to as "The Great Semi-annual Bisexual Debate."

What I am failing to understand is what lesbian groups lose by the inclusion of bi women. I hear you saying that we deprive you of something, but it is never stated what. I understand that the issues of bi and lesbian women are not identical, but then neither are the issues of any two lesbians.

Bi women want to be included as women who love women. It was not so long ago that a lesbian was considered to be (by the lesbian community) a woman who loves women, not a woman who fails to love men. It used to be said "a lesbian is any woman who says she is a lesbian." "Political lesbians," heterosexual women who chose to identify as lesbian, were once a valued part of the community (I've been basing these assertions on old writings by lesbians; try re-reading , for instance, *Sappho Was a Right On Woman.*) How many of the lesbian leaders and thinkers and writers and theorists and musicians and organizers of 20 years ago were bi women? Did they dilute the community? On how many campuses is the woman who is in-your-face-out a biwoman, a biwoman willing to take all the shit associated with being an out lesbian? Do they dilute the community? How many biwomen, from Sappho herself to LA Law's CJ are claimed as lesbians at pride marches? Is this a dilution of the community? How manty articulate voices on this list are biwomen? Have you wondered where some of the women disappearing recently from Sappho have gone, and why?

Why does the idea of biwomen "diluting lesbian space" sound to me so much like "miscegenation diluting the white race", so much like "Jews diluting the Aryan race"?

And I hear lesbians talking about biwomen weakening the lesbian community. I hear lesbians saying biwomen make them feel unsafe. That we are too different to belong. If we can walk among you undetected if we don't bring up the B-word, how can we be so different? Is the lesbian community such a fragile thing that our presence will destroy it? Do you really think so little of yourselves to believe that? Sisters, I've always believed the bonds of women loving women, of women supporting women are unbreakably strong. You are strong beautiful women and biwomen could not destroy your community if they TRIED.

Why turn away an ally? Why turn away a sister? Why turn away those who want to help in the continued building of the community?

I have heard biwomen in lesbian space compared to white women invading the space of lesbians of color. Is this a correct analogy? Or is it more like biracial women in the space of women of color? Is the exclusion of biwomen by lesbians like a women of color caucus excluding white women? Or is it like a white club excluding blacks? Or is it like Latina women feeling uncomfortable with Jewish women feeling uncomfortable with African- American women feeling uncomfortable with Asian women during that third world caucus?

Is the exclusion of biwomen a product of the same dynamic that has excluded transsexual lesbians, S/M lesbians, and lesbians with boychildren? Who fails to meet the lesbian purity test next? Lesbians with men friends? Lesbians with male roomates? Lesbians who socialize with straight women? Who have male supervisors? Who still speak to their fathers or brothers?

I am a biwoman. I love women. I am a feminist. I like being with women. I trust women. I try to be trustworthy to women. I love lesbian culture. I feel emotionally, intellectually, spiritually close to women in a way I have never felt to men. When I meet new people, they assume I am a lesbian (I had someone tell me yesterday that they thought my "bi pride" pin was a statement of political support, and was surprised that it was self identity). I reject heterosexual privilege. I am your sister.

In love and anger,
Sian Gramates

On the discussion of the untrustworthiness of biwomen who will ALWAYS leave you for a man:

1) It's not true (this biwoman's biwoman ex-lover left her for a woman)

2) Biwomen are perfectly capable of making lasting commitments. Sure, some of them will leave you for a man, and some of them will leave you for a woman, and some will leave you to go to grad school, or because they're not happy in the relationship, or any of the myriad other reasons women leave relationships.

3) I've noticed that the lesbian stereotype to biwomen is that they prefer men, and the gaymale stereotype of bimen is that they prefer men. That is, it is assumed that, given a choice, everyone prefers men, that if you're not hardwired to be exclusively attracted to women, that men are the clearly preferable choice. Anybody else find something more that a little woman-hating in this thought?

4) I'm getting some sense of some women saying they don't want to be around biwomen because they may not be the ideal sex partner. YO! I find it VERY insulting to be evaluated as a person solely on my desirability as a sex partner. the last time I checked, women at lesbian events talked to each other, ate together, discussed politics, wrote poetry, danced, etc. you don't go to lesbian events just to get laid. We don't either.▼

Sian Gramates is a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts.

INTERVIEW...

(Continued from page 1)

signed the contract for this book it was like signing for two years of homework. I mean I loved it, but every weekend, every night, papers to read, letters to write. It's a lot of work.

LJC: Is this why Lenore chose not to be an editor?

ERW: She would have been interested in writing a book, but not in editing, and she's working on a novel right now. She was invaluable in being a reader for the manuscripts.

LJC: Did you have any problems soliciting works? Did women respond favorably, or were women reluctant to submit work to a bisexual and feminist book?

ERW: Let me show you something. (Beth pulls out a draw of a file cabinet, filled with paper and files.) This is what made it into the book. (She then pulls out another drawer, even more full than the first.) These are what else I was sent.

There were a couple great essays, but they would be great for a 2nd or 3rd anthology. I sent a lot of the ones I couldn't take to Brad and Naomi in San Francisco for their book on bisexual politics. But it was hard to solicit stuff. I sent out over 300 letters, over 150 letters to women's studies programs.

LJC: Is that normal?

ERW: I don't know. It's an abnormal topic. It's not a common topic.

One thing that I really regret is that there aren't more women of color in the book.

LJC: Are there any?

ERW: Yes, there is one Afro-American woman, two Asian women, and one Chicano.

But one of the problems is it's hard to reach out to bisexual women of color. They are not plugged into the bisexual or lesbian community because of the racist nature of those communities. But we didn't have enough money to cast a wide enough net. I sent stuff to *Ebony*, newsletters and magazines that focus on women of color, but most women of color have other things to worry about than their bisexuality.

LJC: Did any men criticize you for limiting the content, for excluding them?

ERW: Well, no criticism. Michael Beer, an Bisexual activist in Washington, DC, called and talked to me. He said he's a feminist and a bisexual, and was concerned about the exclusion, but as I say on page xiv "We limited the book to writings by women because we wanted to address the unique situation of bisexual women caught between heterosexual sexism and the ideological purity of the lesbian community."

I hear there's a man doing a collection of writings by men, but I don't remember who it is.

LJC: The media presents feminism as outdated. SBWN is currently in a non-politically, very socially oriented, mode. Do you see this as a permanent situation, or just a cycle?

ERW: I think that when they say feminism is outdated, it's like saying Christianity is outdated. It comes in forms that speak to the needs of the times. I mean, in 1992 maybe we don't need consciousness raising groups, but we needed Anita Hill. Anita Hill will probably get three women elected to the Senate this year.

As for the group, I think that two things are happening. A lot of the women who start out in the group were lesbians or at least came through the lesbian community. Now a days, the queer community is so much more open to bisexuality that women like me who came out in the eighties had to come out in the bisexual community, they wouldn't let us be in the lesbian community. But a lot of bisexual women in the lesbian community or queer community, stay there. It's just not as big a deal. I mean my old girlfriend defined herself as bisexual, but is dykier than anyone I know. And she led a lesbian support group at the Lesbian Resource Center for two years.

Another thing is, I would expect, that a lot of the women coming to the groups are coming out of the heterosexual community, because it is very hard to be bisexual in the heterosexual community. In fact, there is not place to do it. So before we had a mix of women coming from the lesbian community and the heterosexual community, but now we're not getting as many women from the lesbian community.

And I think that if you're in the lesbian community you don't need a place to meet women, you need a place to be bisexual. If you're heterosexual, than you want to meet women. How are you going to meet women in Bothell, if all your friends are married?

LJC: Why didn't you write any essays?

ERW: Well mostly, I write essays and they get published in various journals and newsletters. And also, by the end of it I felt that what I wanted to say was said by others, That I had helped others hone their ideas. Being part of that process was pretty exciting, and it also exhausted me.

LJC: For me personally, I've never put my bisexuality with my feminism. Do you hope to raise awareness, educate, etc.?

ERW: Yeah, for me they don't run together either. One is what I believe, and one is what I am. But, what's interesting about the connection between bisexuality and feminism is if feminism is about rejecting gender as a definitive factor in who we are, then bisexuality to me says I'm rejecting gender as a defining factor in who I love. And not to say that gender doesn't exist or isn't important, but it's not an impenetrable barrier, it's a permeable membrane.

(Continued on page 14)

REVIEW

CLOSER TO HOME:BISEXUALITY AND FEMINISM

by Raven Gildea

In her introduction to *Closer to Home*, Elizabeth Reba Weise writes, "We hope that (the essays) will strike a chord, make you shout out loud 'Hallelujah, somebody finally said it!' or throw down the book in disgust." In true bisexual fashion, I did both. At times I literally leapt to my feet yelling "Yes! Yes!". At other times I thought "How can she say that?!" The bottom line was that *Closer to Home* provided me with a veritable feast for my gray cells. During the week I spent reading it, I was (to the amusement and dismay of my housemates and friends) able to talk of little else. Every conversation seemed to begin with, or come around to, "I've just read this really fascinating idea..."

Closer to Home is an anthology of essays by feminist bisexual women. Weise writes that "to be a bisexual-feminist woman means to lead an intensely examined life," and the book brings home the truth of this statement again and again. To be bisexual is to live outside one of the most basic assumptions of our society: that one's sexuality is a statically fixed part of one's identity. As bisexuals we are constantly challenged by an outside world which insists we must fit into one of two mutually exclusive categories. As feminists we constantly question and challenge ourselves: "To what extent are my actions, beliefs and assumptions programmed by patriarchy?"

The essays which make up *Closer to Home* explore the many ways which bisexuality and feminism help us to bend, break, and step outside of these programmed assumptions. Many of them develop theory from the anecdotal incidents of the writer's lives. Several of the women describe their experiences of coming out as bisexual within the lesbian community, and consequently having their lesbian-feminist politics brought into question by those whom they had considered 'family'. Other essays begin with feminist politics and work from there to develop the theory and practice of a bisexual movement.

The book's greatest flaw is that, as an anthology, it tends to cover much of the same ground over and over again. Perhaps this stems partially from the fact that so little has been written about bisexual feminism that the writers were unwilling (and rightly so) to take the basics as understood. When *Closer to Home* is firmly established as part of the feminist bisexual canon, it will be easier to move forward from the groundwork it has laid. The book does tend to get bogged down in repetition about three quarters of the way through. Each writer adds something new to the discourse, but many of them also repeat ideas which have been thoroughly covered on earlier pages.

The writing style is also widely varied, with some essays being firmly grounded in personal experience and others being rooted in academic tradition. The book's uneven feel, however, merely helps to ensure that there will be something in it which strikes a chord with nearly everyone.

The first section of the book, "Definitions," examines the relationship of bisexual identity to other issues addressed by feminism such as race, class, and the struggle to achieve, or even conceptualize, equality within a society which arranges everything in hierarchical structures. Ruth Gibian writes of the hierarchy imbedded in binary opposition, and argues convincingly that dichotomous thinking makes equality impossible. This is not to suggest that there is any need for a bisexual movement ot change the behavior of monosexuals, but merely to re-examine the structure which defines sexuality as a static state which is fully expressed by current behavior.

It is this re-examination which is at the root of biphobia. Bisexuality threatens heterosexuals and homosexuals because it points out the inadequacy of the dichotomous paradigm to describe reality. By our very existence, bisexuals say, "you can't reject my reality, you must reject your neat categories instead." This shakes, to its very core, the polar/hierarchical thinking on which our entire society is based. The personal is indeed political, for our personal lives, loves and desires are inherently revolutionary.

Margaret Mihee Choe draws parallels between racism and the oppression of bisexuals. As an Asian American, she has found herself considered neither black nor white, and therefore defined out of existence in this country's discourse on race. Her essay makes it clear that sexuality is far from the only aspect of identity which is inadequately described by either/or categories. Brenda Blasingame continues this exploration with her discussion of African Americans who are considered "not black enough." When black people are required to look, dress, or act in certain ways in order to be accepted by their own communities, they are trapped by self-enforced ghettoization. The same thing happens when lesbians and gays claim that bisexuals are "not queer enough" or are exercising heterosexual privilege simply by being in love with someone of the opposite sex.

Blasingame also discusses the difficulty of being forced to choose between a straight-identified African American community and a white identitfied queer community. Bisexuals face a similar dilemma when we must relinquish the support of our gay community in order to come out as bi.

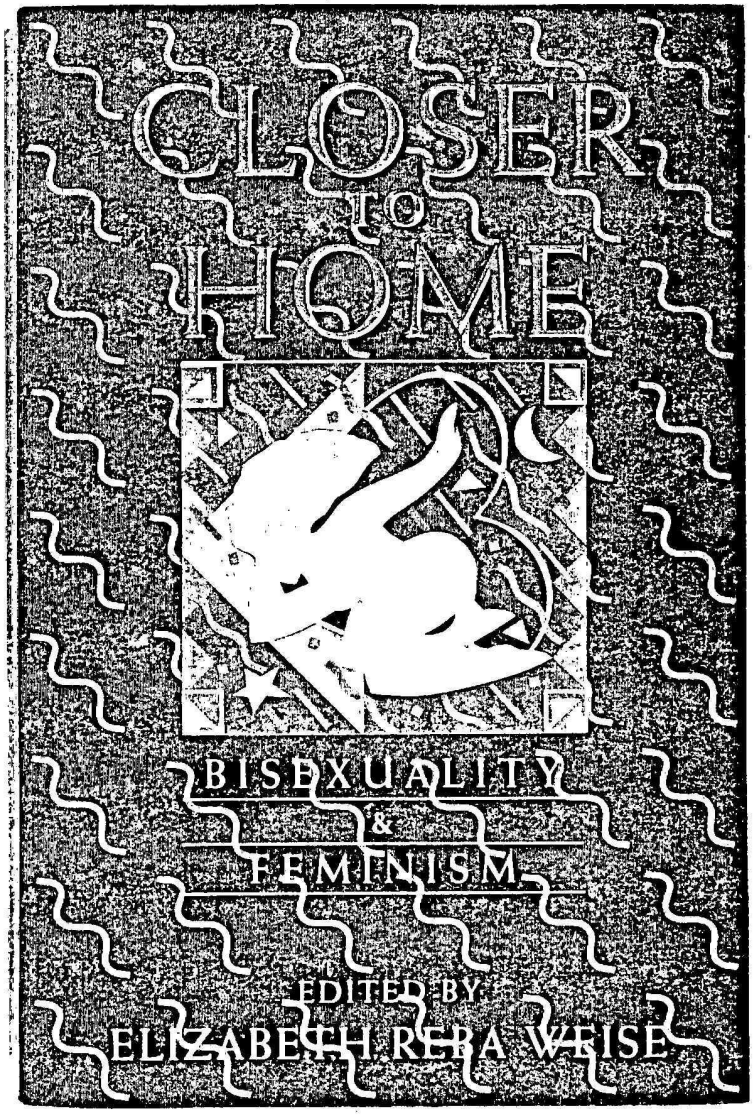
Elizabeth McKeon writes about the classist assumptions inherent in the lesbian community's tendency to marginalize bisexual women. "Some (lesbians) have argued that since bisexual women can get needed resources from 'the patriarchy', they should not drain support from the beleaguered lesbian community. To deman sexual purity in exchange for membership is in lesbian circles, however, requires the assumption that all bisexual women have equal access to patriarchal resources."

The "Principles and Practice" section of *Closer to Home* discusses how we lead our intensely examined lives in a world which wants to dismiss us after a cursory glance. Several essays address the challenges faced by married bisexual women in fighting the rigid set of rules which define marriage. To

(Continued on page 11)

CLOSER TO HOME

BISEXUALITY AND FEMINISM



The brand new anthology edited by Elizabeth Reba Weise, founding member of SBWN, is now available through SBWN for only $15 a copy. A percentage of proceeds goes directly to SBWN. Pick one up at the next meeting or event. Makes a great gift.

REVIEW...

(Continued from page 9)

simply state "I am married to him" brings into the mind of the listener an entire set of assumptions about the nature of the relationship. Bisexual women who choose to marry men are taking on a lot of work if they choose to actively challenge these assumptions.

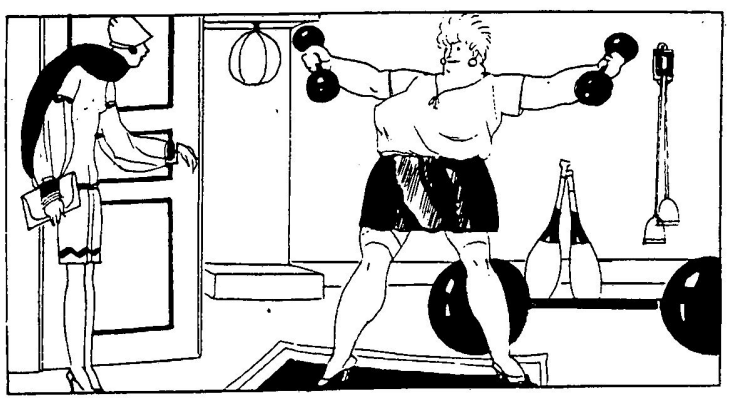
Issues of non-monogamy are brought up, but not thoroughly explored. Perhaps the writers shied away from the subject because, as Susanna Trkna mentions, it is "one of the sterotypes we constantly have to face." All the more reason, then, to discuss what monogamy and non-monogamy mean to us as feminist bisexuals. Whether we choose to be monogamous or not, the paradigm of monogamy is a major factor in our culture's view of sexuality as a static, infelxible part of human nature. When we acknowledge our ability to love across gender lines, we admit that no one person automatically fulfills all that we desire.

Many of the essays focus on the ways in which bisexuals must struggle against a language which is not adequate to describe our experience. This problem springs largely from the fact that our language is based on either/or thought patterns. Language defines sexual identity in terms of the genders of the people involved in sexual activity. Thus we can be in hetero- or homosexual relationships, but we can not be in bisexual relationships. How can we begin to fight for an independent sexual identity if we cannot even claim our individual relationships as wholly our own? How can we be a political force worth reckoning with if we are perceived in a way whch makes us invisible?

Susanna Trnka writes: "Feminism has...given me language with which...to discover who I really am. There is something immensely empowering in being able to name and conceptualize feelings and ideas." In order to create an effective bisexual movement, we must find words for our experience.

Finding words is not easy when language, being male defined, excludes female experience. This is particularly true in the realm of sexuality. For example, intercourse is defined as "penetration", rather than "engulfment," and English contains no words for female sexuality and genitals which are neither clinical nor degrading.

Rebecca Ripley's essay "The Language of Desire" addresses the challenge of expanding beyond either/or thinking when our language leaves us with "too many sexualities, too many definitions...compoeting for the only available world." In addition to looking at hte many different kinds of woman-identified female sexuality available to us, Ripley examines some of the cultural contexts in which these sexualities are framed.



The final section of the book, "The Question of Community," explores ways of building a viable movement and avoiding the pitfalls of letting others define us. Paula Rust's essay picks up where Ripley's look at cultural constructs left off: Rust discusses the construction of homosexual identity in mid-nineteenth century Western culture. "Homosexuality is now no longer something that one does, it is somenthing that one is. One no longer simply engages in sexual relations with members of one's own sex; now, one is a homosexual." This construction leaves bisexuals defined as homosexual when in same-sex relationships, and heterosexual when in opposite-sex relationships. We become neither'nor rather than either/or. Rust writes that when our identity is based on our experiences and our experiences are thus fragmented, "tow different people have been created from these different experiences...leaving us with no identity of our own."

Challenging this social construct is no small task, because "it has become imbedded in a network of social and political institutions. Uprooting the concept of dichotomous sexuality now would disturb the social and political institutions that have been built upon it. Bisexuality threatens to do just that."

If the job seems daunting, it is also exciting. *Closer to Home* left me with the feeling that a bisexual movement has the potential to go far beyond a demand for our fair share of the pie. Feminist bisexuality challenges a world which defines us by the anatomy of our partners and requires us to remain static, compartmentalized identities. If we can truly move beyond this constricting view, we can open up new vistat in every aspect of our culture. Rather than sharing out the pie, we can transform the entire kitchen.▼

BI-FEST Northwest

June 26 & 27

@ Pilgrim Congregational Church, Broadway & Republican

FRIDAY June 26th, 8 pm to Midnight, registration & reception -- come meet other Bisexuals from around the Northwest, schmooz, stuff your face, etc.

SATURDAY June 27th, 10 am to noon - registration & brunch meeting, hear reports from other Bi groups, form caucuses for hate crimes, AIDS, media, & various constituency focuses.
Noon to 6 - Caucuses and workshops.
***6 to 8 - Bi Community DINNER** (vegetarian)*
***8 to Midnight - DANCE PARTY,** featuring alternative dance music. Queer Disco, Punk, industrial...*

***$$$$$** For Bi-Fest -- $15 - 20 sliding scale. (includes Dinner and Dance)*
For Dinner Only - $4 - 6
For Dance Only - $3 - 5
Must RSVP for Dinner, please call 720-4506

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*SUNDAY June 28th, **PRIDE MARCH AND RALLY***
10:15 - 10:45, meet for march at parking lot at 15th and Pike (behind Mike's on Madison)
10:45 Take our place in March line-up
11:00 March and Rally
6:00 pm Picnic -- behind old Seattle Art Museum

BiNET *Seattle* 720 - 4506 for more info.

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North Bi Northwest

NEWS

SBWN/SBMU JOINT DISCUSSION ON SEXISM:LAYS GROUNDWORK FOR BINET SEATTLE

by ben e factory

SBWN and SBMU held a joint discussion meeting on Sunday, April 26th at Seattle Central Community College to help create a better basis for local Bi women and men to work together. The groups met separately for the first hour, then met together for the next two hours, and finally ended up hanging out at Bill's Pizza a block away.

In planning the discussion, both women and men expressed interest in creating a joint group to do more political, educational, organizing and outreach work to create a visible, tangible, and accessible Bi community in Seattle. That group, Bi-Net Seattle, was created by about 20 of us on Friday, May 15th at a potluck meeting at Rob Pedigo's house.

The April 26th sexism discussion was a milestone both in the relations between SBWN and SBMU, and in SBMU's internal efforts to challenge and stop sexism. The discussion touched on many important points and concerns:

1. The connection between patriarchy and: the oppression and exploitation of women as a lower class; the oppression of Queers because of our nonconformity to strict sex-role differentiations; and the oppression of men made emotionally and spiritually disfunctional by male-dominance conditioning.

2. The imperatives for men to take complete responsibility for educating themselves about sexism, for organizing anti-sexist men's work, for rejecting male dominance and privilege, and for personally changing - giving and getting support to/ from other men.

3. The sexism, racism, classism , and other oppressions that we all absorb and perpetuate, and can challenge and stop.

4. Most men often don't really listen to women, and often see women in ways that sexually objectify or nullify them.

5. Men often take control of things whether they realize it or not.

6. Safety, trust, and mutual respect need to be developed for women and men to have positive relations.

The discussion had a good outcome, though much of the joint session was tense with generalized finger-pointing and defensiveness cropping up here and there throughout. This is understandable considering that women and men rarely create a time and place to discuss sexism, though it generates daily suffering and anger. The facilitators, Lizabeth C and David Ward, tried to keep the group focussed on the positive outcome we were working for: a growing Bi community which challenges sexism and is largely free of it.

Hopefully both women and men will make personal commitments to making this happen. The next Bi-Net Seattle meeting is Friday, June 12th, 7pm at Rob's. Check the calendar for further events like the BiFest Northwest, July's retreat and national confence. Call 720- 4506 for more information.▼

BOOK REVIEW

by Kathleen Bennett

Boomer: Railroad Memoirs by Linda Niemann. Cleis Press, $12.95 paperback.

Linda Niemann had recently received a Ph.D. degree when she went to work for the Southern Pacific railroad, a career that occupied her for several years. It is this period of her life that she writes of in *Boomer*, a story about much more than trains.

Niemann is pragmatic and poetic in her writing style, showing the universal through fine attention to the specific details of the life she experienced. Overall, she is extremely frank and matter-of-fact. About the near brushes with death that occur as a matter of course in working with heavy equipment. About the endemic sexism in the industry and the bonding of female brakemen. About her affairs and breakups with women and men. About the eventual demise of the old railroad world in the face of big business, government, and changing times. About the beautiful and dangerous landscapes she came face-to-face with throughtout the American West and Southwest. And about the heavy drinking and alcoholism that is part of the scenery for the near-homeless boomers who follow railroad work around the country.

Niemann's description of her own abuse of alcohol and her decision to pursue recovery is one of the most compelling pieces of writing available on the process of emotional and spiritual transformation. Not vague or abstract or testimonially inspriational, her stories of healing are *real*, gritty, painfrul, and bite into our souls no matter which of life's abuses we may be attempting to recover from. *Boomer* is the story of a life that evades analysis, observed unflinchingly and non-judgmentally, like the endless miles of desert, mountains, and prairie viewed from a steadily rolling train.▼

LETTERS

Dear Friends,

I have become increasingly disturbed over the apparent bigotry portrayed by the media. Enclosed is a letter sent to HBO, Shotime, USA, BET and Jane Fonda, in hopes of making aware the fact that many women are weary of seeing nude women in TV/movies and not revealing the "exciting" parts of men. I'd like to crash this so called boys club. Needless to say, I need help. I'd love to hear any advice, ie whom I should write to, should I need any additional comments and what they should be. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Margaret Ann Stewart

Dear Ladies,

I believe I speak for many women regarding statements throughout this letter.

As long as the entertainment industry has been performing, and especially in recent years, the use of " lovely" women has been proven and somehow accepted. I sure could accept it more if what is considered sexy, and maybe even sexually arousing, could be evenly distributed to show off the male anatomy. Women want to see more men; pulsating, sweaty, buttocks and muscles. What is keeping anyone from exploiting sexy men? It definitely sells as well. For example, Jean Claude Von Damme movies are hits! I can't even rent the latest movie without a reservation because it's always checked out. I'll bet he'd do even better if his movies were "sexed up." I'm positive that I'm amongst many women who'd love to see an erotic swimsuit presentation. Promotion/advertisement must be done strategically, however, with enough sexually stimulating portions to tease viewers.

It is time, we women are ready to be sexually aroused by the tube, as men have been enjoying for years. Let's "beef it up", ladies, for the ladies whom are now finally becoming recognized as more intelligent, powerful, and somewhat equal. Let's finalize the blossoming of womanhood by indulging in our own pleasures. We deserve it, holding jobs and maintaining households. Many women work harder than men do.

Yea to Calvin Klein for the nude male model holding wet jeans to his essentials. Whew! I got so flustered writing that last sentence that I had to copy this page several times.

Why do women flock to live concerts? Certainly not to check the floor wax, but to check out the gyrating of hips in skintight pants. The bulge seems to be a main attraction. Thank you so much to taking time to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Margaret Ann Stewart

INTERVIEW ...

(Continued from page 8)

LJC: Sort of like gortex?

ERW: Yeah, sort of like gortex.

LJC: What growth do you wish to see in the bisexual community in the future?

ERW: Oh you know me, I want it to be feminist and political. Something I think bisexual women can do that no one else really can is consider from both sides how sexism affects relationships, especially heterosexual ones. I mean if you've been with women and then you're with a man it's so abundantly clear how sexism effects how you interact with this person, you know what it's like when it's not there. And I maintain that you can never put up with it again.

LJC: How about an anthology of bisexual fiction? Is there such a thing?

ERW: Actually, Beth Elliot in Oakland is putting together one. address is in previous issues of North Bi Northwest.▼

Start your 1992 Pride Week with

HOT DAM!
women, sex, and latex...

a pilot workshop for lesbians and bisexual women

Wednesday, June 17th
7:00-10:00pm
at
The Northwest AIDS Foundation
127 Broadway East

Call 329-6923 x241 to register

An experience for all of your senses:
Hear, See, Smell, Feel. And Talk.

produced by Northwest AIDS Foundation and SMART WOMEN

SBWN ELECTION RESULTS

SBWN held its bi-yearly elections on April 12. Results are as follows:

Newcomer Coordinator (arranges the facilitators for the Newcomer group): Ellen B.

Secretary: Peggy

External Relations: Joan H.

Newsletter Editors: Erica, Dawn

Mailing List keeper/Librarian: Lizabeth

Treasurer: Lucy (temporarily)

Education/Topic coordinator: Kathleen

Phone coordiantor: Angie

Business meeting chair:

Door opener:

Fundraiser:

Advertising manager for newsletter:

These last four positions have yet to be filled. The Business meeting chair facilitates the 30 min. business meeting or arranges for others to do so. The door opener arrives early to open the door and greet women. The Fundraiser directs the planning of benefits and other methods of raising funds. The Advertising manager solicits ads for the newsletter and does billing. Women interested in any of these positions should call the Biphone at 783-7987.▼

CARTOON

Your "Katie n' Kathy Komix" are REALLY FUNNY!
...thanks...
KATIE-LATHY
Why don't you send them in to WOMEN'S FUNNIES?
They don't seem to have too many LESBIAN comics in there...
WOMENS FUNNIES
Yeah.. a lot of these comics seem sort of hetero, but..
Notice they spelled "WOMEN" with a "MEN" in it...
WOMEN'S FUNNIES
So, how about...
I dunno... they had that anti-Bisexual editorial a couple of issues back...
DYKE ZINE
But.. you BROKE UP with Mark SEVEN MONTHS ago!
Maybe I better wait until I'm in a RELATIONSHIP with a WOMAN again before sending it in...
Well, then, there's ALWAYS..
I think THAT comic's aimed mostly at MEN!
GAY LAFFS
I think "GAY" sort of covers Men AND Women...
NO..NOWADAYS it'd be called "LESBIAN AND GAY LAFFS" if they really WANTED women in it...
GAY LAFFS
OKAY! HERE we go... "QUEER TOONS".. the PERFECT, all-encompassing 'Nineties-Flavored "NON-HETERO" title!
QUEER TOONS
GAY
I HATE that word!
QUEER TOONS
GAY
DYKE ZINE
Roberta Gregory ©1992

Calendar

Please note that topics can be tentative. Call the bi-phone at 783-7987 to check.
For men's events, call the Seattle Bisexual Men's Union at 720-4506.

MAY 30 Queer Nation self-defense class, Call SBMU for details

JUNE 1 SBWN Newcomer's group, 7:15pm

JUNE 7 SBWN topic night: Our feelings about women 6pm

JUNE 7 Pride Day Planning meeting, Portable B108, north end of Seattle Central Community College, Broadway and Pine, 7pm

JUNE 12 Second meeting of Bi-Net Seattle, Potluck at Rob's, 7pm, call SBMU phone for address

JUNE 13 March on Washington regional meeting, SCCC.

JUNE 13 Crossroads Coffeehouse, Crossroads Learning Center, 7:30pm

JUNE 14 SBMU planning meeting, 5:30pm, SCCC Portable B107

JUNE 14 SBMU discussion meeting, topic: Men's emotions and the men's movement, 7pm, Portable B107, SCCC (following planning meeting)

JUNE 15 SBWN Newcomer's group, 7:15pm

JUNE 21 Facilitator training workshop, 2-5pm, Lesbian Resource Center, Free, SBWN members welcome

JUNE 21 SBWN creative expression night in preparation for Freedom Day

JUNE 21 Pride Festival, 12-5, Broadway Playfield on 11th and Pine

JUNE 28 Seattle Pride Parade beginning 11am, Rally beginning at 2;30pm at Volunteer Park Ampitheater. Call for meeting place.

JUNE 26-28 Northwest BiFest, Pilgrim Congregational Church on Broadway and Republican, you must pre-register. Call SBMU for information

JUNE 29 SBWN Newcomer's group, 7:15pm

JULY 3-5 BiNet retreat, British Columbia, you must pre-register, call SBMU for information

JULY 5 SBWN topic night: Our feelings about men, 6pm

JULY 8 SBWN Coordinating Committee meeting, 7pm, at Joan's

JULY 11 March on Washington regional planning meeting, 12 noon, call SBMU for location.

JULY 11 Crossroads Coffeehouse, Crossroads Learning Center, 7:30pm

JULY 12 SBMU discussion meeting: the Biology of Sexual Orientation, SCCC Portable B107, 7pm.

JULY 13 SBWN Newcomer's group, 7:15pm

JULY 19 SBWN Check-in meeting, 6pm

JULY 24-26 BiNet USA Conference, Minnieapolis, Call SBMU for info about carpooling, etc. and to pre-register

JULY 27 SBWN Newcomer's group meeting, 7:15pm

JULY 28 Newsletter folding and mailing party, location TBA

AUGUST 2 SBWN topic night: Our commonalities and affinities, 6pm

SEPTEMBER 19-20 BiNet Dallas Regional Conference